Applying Ethical Guidance of the Five Precepts Broader to Reduce Crime in American Society

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Applying Ethical Guidance of the Five Precepts Broader to Reduce Crime in American Society

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted

as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,

and that it is entirely my own work.

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing politicization of America, personal beliefs and values amongst American citizens remain divided. As such, influenced individuals may manifest their values by committing crimes such as mass shootings, robberies, fraud, etc. In order to deal with this polarizing society, some may turn to religion for relief. By adopting religious core values, religion promotes the formation of an orderly, stable, and peaceful society. Through an intensive literature review exploring Buddhist views and principles, it was found that teachings such as the Buddha's Five Precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path encourages Buddhists to develop mindfulness, practice free speech, and resolve ethical dilemmas by considering others and oneself. These teachings and core values allow people to develop compassion, be more considerate of their surroundings, and condemn thoughts of violence. These practices are not limited to just the Buddhist community but can be applied to society itself. As such, Buddhism addresses bad actors at their roots by discouraging violence as violence accrues karma and is considered one of the least intelligent responses to conflict. Although the government and the law aim to prevent violence through law enforcement, threatening and punishing people does not address thoughts of violence at its roots. Instead a cycle of violence is created where both victims and practitioners continually pay for their actions through karma as they seek to harm each other. By leading more compassionate lives according to the Buddha's teachings, those stuck in the cycle can break free and live more mindful, ethical lives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **i**

ABSTRACT ..... **ii**

TABLE OF CONTENTS **1**

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION **2**

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEWS **4**

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY **35**

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS FROM PRIOR RESEARCH **36**

Origin of The Precepts 36

Ethical Guidelines of the Five Precepts 38

Benefits of The Five Precepts 45

Ineffective Gun Control: Mass Shooting 47

Positive Impact of the Five Precepts on Society 53

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION **54**

Buddhist View on Causes of Violence 54

The Noble Eightfold Path 55

Applying the ethical guidance of the Five Precepts to Society more widely and actively 57

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION **60**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **61**

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Today, American society is facing many moral challenges. The role of religion is very important in promoting an orderly, stable and peaceful society. In this context, the teachings of the Buddha are not limited to the Buddhist community; they can be applied more broadly to the entire human society. The increasing crime rate is one of the problems of American society. According to statistics from The Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey, crime has increased among young people. "The FBI's crime data shows that while fatal and non-fatal gun violence against adults declined in 2022, both increased by more than 10% for young people who are under the age of 18. Similarly, the crime victimization survey shows that the violent victimization rate for people between the ages of 12 and 17 doubled last year — from 13 to 27 violent crimes per 1,000 youth, representing the age group that saw the biggest increase in violent victimization."[1] Why does legal punishment, even the death penalty, not reduce crime? The moral guidance of the Five Precepts has enhanced the moral character of the practitioners. So how can people in society be encouraged to observe the Five Precepts? And do the moral qualities of the Five Precepts have a positive impact on society?

Many studies have focused on the benefits of the Five Precepts for practitioners within the Buddhist community, suggesting that only those who voluntarily join Buddhism are encouraged to observe the Five Precepts. Few studies have looked at the widespread dissemination of the Five Precepts to the general public, as Dr. Hong (Unk) states, "even though Buddhism has been brought to the US for more than a century, the Buddhist population is approximately 1% or less in all states except 2% in California as of 2014. It can be safely stated that Buddhism has not been widely accepted in many states as a religion and has not really

[1] Weihua Li and Jamiles Lartey, "New Data Shows Violent Crime Is Up… And Also Down," *The Marshall Project*, 2023, https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/11/03/violent-crime-property-data-nibrs-ucr-fbi-2022.

entered the American mainstream yet."[2] My research aims to further explore this gap and its impact on society.

The scope of this research includes the study of the Buddhist view of violence and the practices taught by the Buddha to reduce it. The main purpose of this study is to apply the Five Precepts of Buddhism to society to improve morality and reduce crime in society.

I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Biochemistry, and I have been working in the chemical field since 2000. Because I do not believe in superstitions of religions, I have not been involved in any religious activities although my family tradition is Buddhism. Recently, I learned that Buddhist philosophy is based on the laws of nature such as birth, aging, illness, death, and cause and effect, and I started studying Buddhism. I believe that many people like me did not have the opportunity to be exposed to Buddhism before. Therefore, my motivation is to propagate the moral teachings and its benefits of Buddhism more widely.

[2] De Hong, "Teaching Buddhism in Several California State Prisons in the Age of the Internet Plus," Unk., p.10.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEWS

Over 50 sources including books and articles were consulted. Each of the 30 documents mentioned above has been summarized as follows:

"*The Benefits of the Five Precepts*" (Pañcaśikṣānuśaṃsa Sūtra Toh 37) was translated from the Tibetan Canon by Bruno Galasek-Hul (2025)[3]. The text outlines the Buddha's teachings regarding the significance and benefits of observing the five precepts, which are the fundamental ethical guidelines in Buddhism. The sutra is divided into two parts. The first part features a dialogue between a devoted couple, Nakulapitā and Nakulamātā, who ask the Buddha about maintaining their relationship in future lives. The Buddha emphasizes that a shared commitment to faith, moral conduct, generosity, and wisdom, along with practicing the Dharma together, enables couples to remain together after rebirth. The second part of the sutta gives the teaching of the five precepts, instructing people to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and the use of intoxicants. In the discourse, the monks learn about the karmic results of abstaining from the five negative actions. Bhagavān explains that killing leads to rebirth in the Reviving Hell, while abstaining from it leads to a happy rebirth destiny. Similarly, stealing leads to rebirth in the Wailing Hell, while abstaining from it leads to prosperity and stability. The text mentions the consequences of sexual misconduct, which lead to rebirth in the Loud Wailing Hell and many other misfortunes. Conversely, those who abstain from such actions are reborn as men or women, enjoying benefits such as freedom from enemies and easy access to the necessities of life. Lying is correlated with rebirth in the Black Thread Hell, which causes suffering and undesirable physical traits. In contrast, abstaining from lying ensures rebirth as a trustworthy individual with healthy senses. Drinking alcohol will result in rebirth in the Burning Hell,

[3] Bruno Galasek-Hul, "The Benefits of the Five Precepts (Pañcaśikṣānuśaṃsasūtra Toh 37)" (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2025), https://84000.co/translation/toh37.

characterized by intense suffering and adverse mental conditions. Abstinence from alcohol will result in rebirth as a man or woman endowed with mindfulness, noble insight, and clarity of expression. The text emphasizes the importance of cultivating and protecting these moral disciplines in order to attain a favorable rebirth destiny. The monks rejoiced at the wisdom imparted by Bhagavān.

In the study "*Buddhist Principles for Development of Human Behavior, Morality, Mind and Wisdom*," Ruksat et al. (2025)[4] explores the application of Buddhist principles in the development of human behavior, morality, mind and wisdom. Using a qualitative literature approach, the study draws on Buddhist scriptures and scholarly works to examine how internal factors such as innate mental states and temperament, along with external influences such as upbringing, social interactions and environment, shape human behavior. The core focus of the study is moral development through the observance of the five precepts, which purify the body and speech and promote wholesome actions, thereby maintaining human qualities and reducing the likelihood of rebirth in the realms of suffering. Buddhism emphasizes the potential of individuals to improve themselves through self-reliance and perseverance. The teachings advocate the cultivation of a virtuous mind through activities such as meditation, critical thinking, and study. The ultimate goal is to free oneself from suffering by developing morality, understanding the true nature of things, and cultivating wisdom. Research emphasizes that behavior is largely influenced by the mind, which acts as a guide to actions; therefore, training and purifying the mind is crucial to achieving happiness and peace of mind. To promote the development of one's own virtue, authors propose the RNACM model, which outlines five key principles: Respectfulness, Normality, Awakening, Comprehension, and Mindfulness.

[4] Suvin Ruksat et al., "Buddhist Principles for Development of Human Behavior, Morality, Mind and Wisdom," *Journal of Posthumanism* 5, no. 3 (2025): 815–27, https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.791.

Respectfulness requires polite and appropriate behavior in social interactions. Normality involves maintaining moral behavior by avoiding bad actions. Awakening emphasizes awareness and enlightenment. Comprehension involves understanding reality and accepting cause and effect. Mindfulness is essential to maintain mental clarity, prevent mistakes, and enhance wisdom. This model advocates continuous spiritual cultivation through mindfulness and concentration to purify the mind, eliminate suffering, and cultivate lasting happiness and peace.

In the article "*Karma and Ethical Responsibility in Theravada Buddhism*," Dr. Praveen Kumar and research scholar Tilawkathara (2024)[5] explore the relationship between karma and moral responsibility in Theravada Buddhism. Karma and moral responsibility are not just abstract concepts in Theravada Buddhism; they are core principles that significantly shape ethical decision-making and influence everyday behavior. The concept of karma emphasizes individual agency, allowing practitioners to actively shape their own destinies through their thoughts, words, and actions. This view actively distances itself from deterministic interpretations of fate. Karma acts as a moral force, closely tied to moral choices and fostering a deep sense of responsibility. In the context of Theravada Buddhism, karma is closely tied to intentional actions and their subsequent consequences. It emphasizes that karma is both individual and personal, acting as a crucial distinction that separates beings within samsara. Every action performed has consequences, and the moral quality of that action shapes future experiences. By understanding that their actions have long-term implications, practitioners are encouraged to apply a mindful approach to their daily lives, weighing their decisions with ethical considerations. An integral part of the understanding of karma in Theravada Buddhism are the Five Precepts, which serve as basic ethical guidelines for lay Buddhists. Each precept serves not

[5] Tilawkathara and Praveen Kumar, "Karma and Ethical Responsibility in Theravada Buddhism," *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 5, no. 4 (2024): 4399–4403.

only as a rule but also as a practice that helps cultivate positive karma and reduce harmful actions. Observing these precepts increases awareness of one's actions and intentions, setting practitioners on the right path to enlightenment. Furthermore, the Noble Eightfold Path provides a comprehensive guide to moral and spiritual development, with the goal of liberating people from the attachments and delusions that contribute to suffering. This path includes principles of wisdom, ethical conduct, and concentration, integrating moral and spiritual development into daily life. The Noble Eightfold Path not only guides individual practitioners to enlightenment, but also supports a society built on fairness, justice, and compassion. Mindfulness plays an important role in translating the theoretical aspects of karma into practical experience within the framework of Theravada Buddhism. It ensures that intentions are aligned with ethical actions, allowing individuals to recognize and stop unwholesome thoughts before they manifest into harmful actions. By cultivating mindfulness, practitioners can prevent negative karma from manifesting and promote positive actions that contribute to collective well-being.

In the article *"The Five Precepts of Buddhism for the Peaceful World,"* Dr. Sumana and Dr. Bhante (2024)[6] discuss the Five Buddhist Precepts, which serve as basic ethical guidelines for lay Buddhists, promoting the ideals of peace, self-restraint, and compassion. The Buddhist path to ultimate peace consists of three components: Sīla (morality), Samādhi (concentration), and Paññaṇa (wisdom). Of these, Sīla is the foundation, emphasizing harmlessness and peaceful respect for others. It has two aspects: Cāritta Sīla (fulfillment of moral duties) and Vāritta Sīla (refraining from immoral conduct). These precepts are not mere rules but voluntary commitments that lead to personal and social happiness, mental clarity, and moral integrity. By observing the Five Precepts, individuals can cultivate virtues that help alleviate suffering and

[6] Sumana and Chandrakitti Bhante, "The Five Precepts of Buddhism for the Peaceful World," *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 5, no. 3 (2024): 1710–13.

contribute to a peaceful society. Furthermore, support for these precepts reflects a holistic approach to ethics and spiritual development in Buddhism, emphasizing the connection between individual actions and larger social impact. Adherence to these precepts promotes an environment of harmony and moral discipline that is essential for spiritual growth and a peaceful world.

The article "*Learning from Buddhist Teachings and Ethical Practices in Qualitative Research*" by Pei-Jung Li (2023)[7] explores the integration of Buddhist teachings into research ethics in qualitative research, focusing on concepts such as equality, karma, the five precepts, and repentance to enhance ethical practices. The author reflects on how her Buddhist beliefs have shaped her approach as a qualitative researcher, emphasizing the importance of relational ethics and a critical perspective in conducting research. Buddhist principles guide the treatment of research participants, emphasizing the inherent equality of all beings and the significance of karma in shaping interactions. The five Buddhist precepts—not to harm, not to steal, not to commit sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to use intoxicants—serve as ethical standards for researchers. The practice of repentance is emphasized as an important means of reflecting on mistakes made during research and taking responsibility for potentially harmful actions. The article advocates a non-hierarchical relationship between researchers and participants, encouraging researchers to learn from their participants rather than treating them as objects. The article emphasizes the importance of open and honest communication, while acknowledging that maintaining ethical behavior can be challenging, hence the need to practice repentance. Repentance involves deeply reflecting on one's actions, understanding their impact, and committing to preventing recurrence. The principles of no harming and no lying are central to

[7] Pei-Jung Li, "Learning from Buddhist Teachings and Ethical Practices in Qualitative Research," *The Qualitative Report* 28, no. 1 (2023): 285–300, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.5772.

this practice, ensuring that researchers act with integrity and mindfulness. The author shares a personal experience with a participant involved in identity conflict, illustrating the importance of directly addressing concerns to promote understanding and ethical dialogue. The article concludes that incorporating these Buddhist teachings into qualitative research can significantly deepen ethical practices, promoting greater respect and awareness in the relationship between researcher and participant.

The chapter "Ethical and Legal Issues in Education" in the book *Foundations of American Education: A Critical Lens*, Dr. Wells and Dr. Clayton (2021)[8] explore the complex dynamics that govern the rights and responsibilities of educators and students, emphasizing the importance of ethical and legal frameworks in shaping educational practices. The authors emphasize the role of the Professional Code of Ethics in guiding teachers in making right and wrong decisions in their educational roles, ensuring the quality and integrity of their actions. The focus of the discussion is on the United States Constitution, specifically the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The First Amendment protects freedom of speech, religion, and the press, while the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees equal protection and due process. These constitutional rights are essential in the educational settings. The authors also discuss how the Court System impacts educational policies, maintaining fairness in legal disputes related to education. The courts must uphold the principle of impartiality, ensuring that both students and teachers are treated without bias. This legal framework extends to Teachers' Rights, which provide legal protections in relation to employment, academic freedom, and union participation. Teaching contracts outline the expectations and responsibilities of educators, while tenure provides an additional layer of job security against unfair dismissal. Furthermore, Freedom of Speech and

[8] Melissa Wells and Courtney Clayton, *Foundations of American Education: A Critical Lens* (VIVA Open Publishing, 2021).

Expression is explored, emphasizing that educators must navigate their rights carefully both inside and outside the classroom. The author discusses Liability and Teachers, emphasizing the obligation of educators to ensure the safety of students in their care. Legal concepts of negligence set standards of accountability, while safeguards exist to limit teachers' liability in certain circumstances. The importance of Teachers' Privacy is also highlighted, with the Fourth Amendment protecting against unreasonable searches and seizures. The intersection of Religion and Schools emphasizes the First Amendment's prohibition on government endorsement of religion. The Supreme Court has consistently reinforced this separation, ensuring that personal beliefs do not compromise the integrity of the educational environment. Referring to Student Rights, the author asserts that students possess many constitutional rights, including freedom of speech and protection from discrimination. Discussions of Dress Codes and Search and Seizure emphasize the need for schools to balance maintaining order with respecting students' rights.

In "*Mass Shootings: Causes and Prevention*," criminal justice journalist Mark Obbie (2021)[9] summarizes key findings from leading research on mass shootings. This HFG[10] Research and Policy Brief presents a comprehensive overview of mass shootings in the United States, identifying actionable policy recommendations to address this important issue. Findings are categorized into five areas, including firearms regulation, threat assessments, data tracking, and emergency response strategies. Clear definitions are emphasized to avoid confusion around violence trends and policy goals. Key recommendations focus on regulating high-capacity weapons, restricting access to high-risk individuals, and developing effective early warning systems. Additionally, the brief highlights the importance of improving data collection on mass

[9] Mark Obbie, "Mass Shootings: Causes and Prevention," *The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation*, 2021, https://www.hfg.org/hfg_reports/mass-shootings/.
[10] The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation https://www.hfg.org

shootings to better inform prevention efforts. Research shows that mass shooters often use semi-automatic rifles or multiple types of guns to increase their lethality, and the brief argues that restricting large-capacity ammunition magazines (LCMs) would be more effective than outright bans on assault rifles. Recommendations include limiting magazines to 10 rounds and banning devices that enable semi-automatic weapons to operate similarly to automatic weapons, such as bump stocks. To prevent dangerous individuals from accessing guns, laws requiring a license to purchase firearms have been shown to be effective in reducing access to guns for at-risk populations. Many mass shooters were prohibited from owning guns due to felony or domestic violence convictions. Implementing extreme risk protection orders, or "red flag laws," is proposed as a proactive measure to address threats. Strengthening early warning systems and reducing fatalities in incidents are further focuses. Finally, the brief calls for improved tracking of mass violence data, emphasizing the need for reliable information to shape future policies. Overall, the findings suggest a multifaceted approach to reducing the impact of mass shootings and enhancing public safety.

In the chapter "Hope" of *The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic*, Peterson and Densley (2021)[11] describe Caitlin, a woman from the Midwest, reflecting on the pivotal moment when her instincts led her to report a suspicious teenager, helping to prevent a potential mass shooting. The experience transformed her career aspirations from law enforcement to social work, as she now seeks to support individuals in need rather than simply detaining them. The story highlights the importance of individual actions in preventing violence. It shows that anyone can intervene when they notice something troubling, while organizations must create supportive and trauma-informed environments. Additionally, societal changes,

[11] Jillian Peterson and James Densley, *The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic* (New York: Abrams Press, 2021).

including electing responsible policymakers and addressing the root causes of violence, are critical to effective prevention. The chapter also introduces Ann and Valerie, who were affected by the loss of a family member to violence, expressing frustration over their lack of access to mental health resources. Mike, the father of a young suicide victim, shares his pain over missed opportunities to intervene in a timely manner. Their stories illustrate the urgent need for accessible mental health services. Missy, a survivor of the Red Lake school shooting, reflects on the lack of mental health support in schools that played a role in the tragedy. She advocates for improved emergency protocols and increased mental health awareness, recognizing that solutions to mass shootings are complex and cannot be simplified. The chapter concludes with action steps for individuals, organizations, and society to reduce mass shootings. Individuals should build supportive relationships and develop crisis intervention skills. Organizations should implement trauma-informed practices and improve communication among employees. Societies should promote access to mental health and enforce stricter gun laws. The chapter emphasizes the need for collective action to prevent violence and create a safer, more connected world for all.

In the article "*Buddhist Five Precepts: Necessity and Benefits*," Theingyi (2021)[12] emphasizes the importance of the Five Precepts as basic ethical principles for lay Buddhists. These precepts are considered the minimum moral standards that one should observe to lead a righteous and harmonious life. They are central to the practice of moral discipline in Buddhism, serving as a foundation on which individuals can cultivate moral dispositions and conduct. The main purpose of these precepts is to promote actions that do not harm oneself or others, thus promoting a peaceful, respectful and compassionate society. By observing these principles,

[12] Yuzana Theingyi, "Buddhist Five Precepts: Necessity and Benefits," *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies* 9, no. 66 (2021): 15341–45.

individuals not only improve their own character but also contribute positively to the community at large, creating an environment rooted in mutual trust and understanding. The precepts are structured on two levels, emphasizing both social harmony and spiritual progress. At the first level, they enable individuals to live peacefully and cooperatively in society by setting clear boundaries of appropriate behavior. The second level of the precepts concerns their role as the first step in the spiritual journey toward liberation. Observance of these precepts purifies the mind, reducing unwholesome mental states such as greed, hatred, and delusion, while cultivating wholesome qualities such as compassion, contentment, honesty, and mindfulness. As practitioners deepen their practice, they develop moral strength and mental clarity, paving the way for further spiritual development and ultimately enlightenment. Theingyi also emphasized that in order to understand the Five Precepts, it is necessary to recognize their dual nature: they are both action-based and result-oriented. Observance of these precepts is not simply a matter of following external rules but also of cultivating internal mental states that are conducive to personal growth and social harmony. The precepts assist individuals in developing moral strength and resilience against unwholesome tendencies. The focus is on the actual practice of the self, and the emphasis is on the fact that moral discipline is essential for a meaningful, healthy, and fulfilling life.

In the thesis "*Buddhist Ethics and Its Impacts on Modern Time*," Tonni (2021)[13] highlights the enduring relevance of Buddhist ethics in addressing contemporary moral dilemmas. By advocating for compassionate and wise living, grounded in the principles of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, Buddhism offers a compelling ethical framework for navigating the complexities of modern life. While challenges persist in applying

[13] Shaikh Tajmoon Nahar Tonni, “Buddhist Ethics and Its Impacts on Modern Time” (Bangladesh, University of Rajshahi, 2021).

these teachings in a materialistic and individualistic world, the thesis underscores the transformative potential of Buddhist ethics in promoting personal well-being, social harmony, and environmental stewardship. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of integrating Buddhist ethical principles into everyday practices to foster a more ethical and compassionate society in the modern era.

The FBI report "*A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States between 2000 - 2013*" by Silver, Simons, and Craun (2018)[14] represents a significant shift in the understanding of active shooters. Unlike previous reports that primarily look at the circumstances surrounding these tragic events; this study called "Phase II," focuses on the observable behaviors that shooters exhibit before they attack. The initiative aims to provide valuable insights into the warning signs that may indicate an individual is on a path toward violence, thereby enhancing prevention strategies. The study analyzes a sample of 160 active shooters and avoid the situational analysis of previous studies. Instead, the authors develop a robust protocol including 104 variables that address different aspects of each case. These variables include demographic information, planning and preparation, gun purchases, stressors affecting shooters, their grievances, and pre-attack behaviors and communication. By focusing on these factors, the FBI seek to assess subtle behavioral indicators that may suggest impending violence. Key findings from this study suggest that many active shooters exhibit troubling behaviors such as unusual aggression, significant changes in personal hygiene, changes in sleep patterns, and disengagement from social interactions. Additionally, some shooters act impulsively and make verbal threats of violence. These indicators suggest that there may be

[14] James Silver, Andre Simons, and Sarah Craun, *A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States between 2000–2013* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 2018).

identifiable behavioral patterns that allow friends, family members, teachers, and employers to recognize individuals at risk of violence, thereby prompting timely intervention. Despite this wealth of information, the FBI cautions against using these observed behaviors as a definitive predictor of violence. The study underscores the importance of raising awareness in the community and promoting open dialogue about concerning behaviors. It underscores the need for bystanders—from parents to educators—to be informed of these warning signs, as their involvement can be crucial in preventing potential attacks. Ultimately, this report serves as a call to action for law enforcement, mental health professionals, and the general public. By equipping people with the knowledge to identify and respond to concerning behaviors, the risk of future active shooter incidents is more likely to be reduced. These findings emphasize the importance of joint efforts to prevent violence and ensure that shooting-related tragedies are addressed proactively and effectively.

In his study "*By Each Crime and Every Kindness, We Birth Our Future: A Buddhist Perspective Towards High Crime Rates*," Nelson (2018)[15] addresses the high crime and incarceration rates in Louisiana, which has one of the highest per capita prison populations in the United States. Despite efforts to reduce these rates, Louisiana's incarceration rates remain alarmingly high. The article examines the Kingdom of Bhutan, a small Himalayan nation known for its strong Buddhist culture, as a contrasting jurisdiction with a significantly lower crime rate. Bhutan transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy in 2008, establishing a governance framework that empowers citizens while maintaining law and order. Law enforcement in Bhutan is centralized under the Royal Bhutan Police, which acts as the sole

[15] Jared Nelson, "'By Each Crime and Every Kindness, We Birth Our Future' A Buddhist Perspective Towards High Crime Rates," *Journal of Race, Gender and Poverty*, 2018, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3131022.

national police agency, ensuring uniform public safety. In contrast, Louisiana's law enforcement is fragmented across multiple local and state agencies, with the sheriff serving as the primary law enforcement officer in each parish. This difference affects their approaches to policing and crime prevention. Both Bhutan and Louisiana have established criminal codes, but Bhutan uses a more detailed classification of offenses, covering many minor offenses, while Louisiana uses a broader classification of offenses. The analysis illustrates how Bhutan's lower crime rate can be attributed to effective policing, community engagement, and the influence of Buddhist values. Recommendations for Louisiana include increasing mental health training for law enforcement and actively engaging the public in crime prevention initiatives, based on Bhutan's successful community policing model. The conclusion emphasizes that by applying insights from Bhutan's approach to crime, Louisiana can develop strategies to build safer communities and reduce its high incarceration rate.

In her dissertation *"A Study of a Shambhala Buddhist Approach to Crime, Society, and Transformation,"* Thompson (2018)[16] reflects on her upbringing as a Tantric Buddhist and her personal experiences with sexual exploitation, which sparked her desire to explore a Buddhist approach to crime and harm. Frustrated by the choice between protecting public privacy and engaging in a punitive penal system, the author raises questions about a justice system based on Buddhist principles of goodness and the intrinsic value of human life. This study aims to equip social activists with practical tools to address issues of violence and harm. This study proposes a vision of justice and social transformation rooted in Buddhist principles. The analysis draws specifically on Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Shambhala tradition. This study examines the context and myths of the origins of Shambhala Buddhism to understand social norms and values,

[16] Karuna Thompson, "A Study of a Shambhala Buddhist Approach to Crime, Society, and Transformation" (Rosemead, California, University of the West, 2018).

emphasizing that the Dharma should be practiced in ordinary life. Within this framework, justice and crime are understood within a worldview that emphasizes the preciousness of human life, the moral obligations of society, and the role of leadership in cultivating inherent mindfulness and insight. The prevention of crime and its causes are entrusted to leaders with the responsibility for its proper distribution. In its ideal form, this leadership is represented by the wheel-turning king, Cakkavatti, who rules with generosity and justice. When these duties are neglected, society descends into chaos and crime. The restoration of social harmony depends on the reassertion of ethical behavior, guided by the Five Precepts: abstaining from killing, lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. Recognizing the innate goodness and capacity for understanding within each individual, this approach suggests that offenders can, through inner awakening and self-awareness, change the habitual patterns that lead to their criminal behavior, promoting personal and social transformation. Such transformation is facilitated by creating environments that promote relaxation, reconnection with sensory experiences, and healing from traumatic life events. Finally, this study briefly examines Western perspectives on crime and punishment, ultimately advocating for prison abolition, inspired by the Buddhist view that justice should be rooted in education and healing. In this context, justice is envisioned as promoting environments that support skill development, access to resources, and meaningful lives, aiming for social reparation through compassionate and transformative means rather than incarceration.

In his book "*The Triple Gem*," Master Hsing Yun (2018)[17] offers an in-depth exploration of the concept of the Triple Gem in Buddhism and focuses particularly on the importance of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Triple Gem are considered the source of noble wealth that transcends material wealth, bringing wisdom and spiritual enrichment. The act

[17] Hsing Yun, *The Triple Gem* (Taiwan: Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center, 2018).

of taking refuge imbues life with greater meaning and security, cultivating a spiritual connection with the Buddha. This connection emphasizes the belief that true spiritual support lies in the Triple Gem. The process is presented as a foundational step for beginners on the Buddhist path, emphasizing its importance as a beneficial alternative to the pursuit of worldly fame and fortune. By taking refuge in the Triple Gem, individuals are formally committing to the Buddha's teachings, marking the beginning of their journey to becoming a Buddhist. Taking refuge is not only expressed as an affirmation of faith but also as a reflection that all sentient beings possess Buddha nature. Master Hsing Yun also emphasizes that taking refuge in the Triple Gem is an act of transforming self-esteem and acknowledging one's inner nature. This commitment is achieved through the practice of the Five Precepts along with taking refuge. It is a path towards spiritual and moral development, enriching one's life through the teachings of Buddhism.

In his book "*Learning from Buddha*," Chang (2015)[18] presents an important Dharma treasure for practitioners who wish to attain spiritual attainment and liberation. The text is organized into three main sections. The first section emphasizes the importance of self-cultivation as a prerequisite for spiritual attainment. It makes clear that engaging in wholesome actions and purifying one's karma are essential to accessing the benefits of Buddhist practice. Merely wishing for spiritual success without making efforts to develop oneself is not enough. The second section discusses the important role of Dharma study along with self-cultivation. It states that acquiring knowledge of the Dharma is indispensable to developing the potential for true enlightenment. The teachings point out that an individual cannot overcome mere psychological effects or manifest superficial powers without a solid understanding of the fundamental principles of Buddhism. In the third part, the author emphasizes that merely hearing

[18] Dorje Chang, *Learning from Buddha* (Dharma Voice Publishing, 2015).

the teachings without putting them into practice is useless. Disciples are encouraged to actively apply the lessons learned through practice, otherwise they risk becoming lost and not progressing on their spiritual journey. Practical application is presented as crucial for the teachings to bear fruit, ultimately leading practitioners to liberation and accomplishment.

The chapter "Refuge in the Three Jewels" in the book *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, Bhiksu Tenzin Gyatso (2014)[19] explains that taking refuge in the Three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, is a fundamental practice widely recognized in all Buddhist traditions as the foundation for becoming a Buddhist. This act of taking refuge represents a deep commitment that goes beyond formal declaration. It involves understanding the teachings through reason and personal experience, ultimately affirming the truth of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha emphasized the importance of practice and personal understanding rather than blind faith, guiding his followers on the path to liberation and enlightenment. The nature of taking refuge is tied to the concept of interdependence, articulated by Nāgārjuna. By understanding dependent origination, practitioners can realize the emptiness of all things, leading to a profound understanding of the Four Noble truths: the nature of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path to achieve that cessation. The qualities attributed to the Tathagata, play an important role in deepening practitioners' faith in the Three Jewels. These qualities reflect the unique nature of the historical Buddha and serve as inspiration for those who wish to follow his path. In the Pāli tradition, the Buddha Jewel refers specifically to the historical Buddha and his teachings. His teachings, including the Dhamma, form the ethical and philosophical framework that guides practitioners toward their own enlightenment. In this tradition, the Sangha represents the community of spiritual practitioners, especially those who have attained nirvana. In contrast, the

[19] Bhiksu Tenzin Gyatso and Bhiksunı Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2014).

Sanskrit tradition introduces a deep understanding of the Three Jewels through texts such as the Ratnagotravibhāga. This tradition elaborates on both the ultimate and conventional aspects of the Three Jewels, recognizing how they manifest in various forms. The Buddha is seen not only as a historical figure but also as the embodiment of many aspects, including dharmakāya (truth body) and rūpakāya (form body). Through this lens, practitioners gain a deeper understanding of how the Three Jewels lead them to enlightenment. The Three Jewels are considered "jewels" because of their rarity and profound ability to provide the guidance and refuge needed for individuals seeking salvation from the painful cycle of suffering. They are constantly present to protect practitioners from the duḥkha inherent in existence and illuminate the path to lasting fulfillment. Individuals can engage with the Three Jewels at various levels, often motivated by a fear of unfortunate rebirth or a compassionate desire to alleviate the suffering of others. Ultimately, taking refuge promotes the pursuit of ethical conduct and spiritual development.

In his article "*Buddhism and Non-Violent World: Examining a Buddhist Contribution to Promoting the Principle of Non-Violence and a Culture of Peace*," Tanabe (2014)[20] explores how Buddhist analysis of the human mind aims to deepen our understanding of the psychological dynamics of violence and promote inner peace for a more humane world. The article highlights how analyzing our minds can lead to insights into the root causes of violence and can help promote a culture centered on peace. The study uses key Buddhist texts and teachings, such as the Dhammapada, the Shurangama Sutra, Nagarjuna's Seventy Verses on Emptiness, and the Mahasatipatthana Sutra to build his arguments. The article asserts that violence is any form of inhuman behavior - whether direct, structural, or cultural - that harms another person. The article argues that the state of the world we observe is a reflection of the state of our own minds. It

[20] Juichiro Tanabe, "Buddhism and Non-Violent World: Examining a Buddhist Contribution to Promoting the Principle of Non-Violence and a Culture of Peace," *In Factis Pax* 8, no. 2 (2014): 122–46.

identifies the causes of violence as rooted in our own mental constructs and discusses how a critical analysis of our thought processes can provide insight into the inner motivations that lead to violent acts. Central to this analysis are the Four Noble Truths, which outline the nature of suffering, its origin, the path to overcoming it, and the practices that lead to its cessation. According to Buddhism, suffering arises from greed, attachment, and ignorance - essentially a misunderstanding of reality. The article explains that to overcome suffering, we must address these causes through a path that includes right view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The article further explains that violence is rooted in our thought processes and that we often rely on socially ingrained habits of mind that shape our perception of reality, ultimately leading to a tendency to absolutize particular frames of reference as universally applicable. To cultivate a culture of peace, the article argues for the need for pathways to escape conditioned states of mind, with mindfulness being the main method proposed. This practice promotes awareness of the social conditioning of our thinking, allowing us to identify less with our inherent views and be more responsive to others. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the importance of making a shift in perspective. This involves developing wisdom to gain deeper insights into reality. By engaging in contemplative activities, individuals can recognize the interdependent and interpenetrating nature of reality, which can help break down the walls of perceived difference that separate individuals and communities.

The chapter "Buddhist Belief and Living Ethics: Challenging Business Ethics" in the book *Belief and Organization*, Case and Brohm (2012)[21] criticize traditional business ethics, which they argue is rooted in Enlightenment philosophy and focuses on the individual self as the basis for moral reasoning. The authors propose an alternative perspective based on Buddhist

[21] Peter Case, Heather Höpfl, and Hugo Letiche, *Belief and Organization* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

ethics, particularly the concept of “no-self,” arguing that ethics should transcend individual-centered frameworks. They aim to integrate Buddhist ethics into the discourse surrounding business practices, emphasizing its potential to transform contemporary workplace ethics. Their discussion is informed by the Theravada Pali Canon, explaining that Buddhist ethics aims to achieve nibbāna through the alleviation of suffering rather than following fixed moral rules. Case and Brohm emphasize the importance of “right speech” and intention in everyday ethical dilemmas, in contrast to mainstream business ethics, which is often based on utilitarian or deontological principles. They argue for a shift from “ethical business,” which is self-serving, to “ethical business,” which prioritizes the well-being of others. This shift supports a Buddhist-inspired ethical framework that emphasizes interconnectedness, altruism, and the impact of actions within organizations. Finally, they propose that adopting this ethical perspective can address the limitations of existing systems while still meeting the demands of modern organizational life, advocating an approach that is both utilitarian and altruistic.

In the book "*One Life, Five Precepts: Buddhist Ethics for Modern Living*," Venerable Faxun (2011)[22] presents a framework for ethical conduct based on the Five Precepts of Buddhism, aimed at addressing the spiritual void in contemporary society. The book emphasizes the importance of ethical living in the context of increasing materialism and offers practical guidelines for promoting peace, generosity, and respect in relationships. The author notes that these precepts are not rigid commandments but voluntary practices to cultivate moral discipline and promote a better life. They are intended to guide people towards personal and social happiness, ultimately leading to a harmonious and liberated community through moral actions.

[22] Venerable Faxun, *One Life, Five Precepts: Buddhist Ethics for Modern Living* (Shi Faxun, 2011), http://ethics.buddhist.sg.

The text discusses common misconceptions regarding freedom and morality, emphasizing the liberating nature of the precepts when lived sincerely.

The article "*Morality, Self-Control, and Crime*" by Antonaccio and Tittle (2009)[23] examines the interaction between Self-Control Theory and morality in predicting criminal behavior, based on data from a survey conducted in Lviv, Ukraine. The findings show that both self-control and morality are significant predictors of criminal behavior; however, morality emerges as a particularly strong independent predictor. When morality is taken into account, the predictive power of self-control decreases, suggesting that morality operates independently and does not significantly interact with self-control in predicting criminality. Research prior to this study has consistently shown that self-control is a persistent predictor of criminal behavior across a variety of cultural contexts. However, morality has been largely unexplored in criminological research, which has traditionally emphasized the capacity for self-control. Empirical evidence suggests that a lack of morality can reasonably predict criminal behavior, and previous studies have linked moral commitments to lower crime rates. This article highlights the need to further explore how morality and self-control relate to each other and their respective effects on criminal behavior. The authors refer to Situational Action Theory (SAT), which posits morality as a key factor in guiding behavior, often negating the impact of self-control. According to SAT, individuals refrain from committing crimes based on their moral beliefs, which may make self-control less relevant. In contrast, Self-Control Theory traditionally suggests that self-control should be the primary variable in explaining criminal behavior. The current study aimed to assess the relative power of self-control versus moral beliefs in predicting criminal behavior in a sample of Ukrainian adults. The study used a random sampling method to collect data from 500

[23] Olena Antonaccio and Charles R. Tittle, "Morality, Self-Control, and Crime," *Visnyk Lviv University*, Sociology Series, no. 3 (2009): 84–101.

adults in Lviv, using multiple measures of self-control and morality. The goal was to determine how these variables related to respondents' self-reported likelihood of engaging in various criminal behaviors. The results showed that self-control was significantly associated with predicted crime/deviant behavior across all three measures, but morality consistently demonstrated an even stronger association. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the predictive power of self-control was reduced when morality was included in the equation. While self-control remained an important factor, especially in predicting violent crimes, morality's strong predictive power suggests that it plays a more important role in understanding crime. Therefore, the authors conclude that effective explanations and predictions of criminal behavior will likely require an integrated theoretical approach that incorporates both self-control and morality.

In the dissertation titled "*Avoiding Pamāda: An Analysis of the Fifth Precept as Social Protection in Contemporary Contexts with Reference to the Early Buddhist Teachings,*" Trafford (2009)[24] analyzes the Fifth Precept of Buddhism, which calls for practitioners to refrain from taking intoxicants to avoid heedlessness (pamāda). He provides a thorough examination of the Fifth Precept in Buddhism, highlighting its importance for lay practitioners in today society. By delving into the concept of pamāda and exploring its implications for individual behavior and social welfare, the dissertation sheds light on the relevance and significance of ethical guidelines in modern life. The study's nuanced approach to understanding the Fifth Precept in diverse cultural and historical contexts offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to deepen their understanding of Buddhist ethics and the practical applications of this fundamental precept.

[24] Paul Trafford, "Avoiding Pamāda: An Analysis of the Fifth Precept as Social Protection in Contemporary Contexts with Reference to the Early Buddhist Teachings" (Oxford University, 2009), https://www.academia.edu/34976455/Avoiding_pam%C4%81da_An_analysis_of_the_Fifth_Precept_as_Social_Protection_in_Contemporary_Contexts_with_reference_to_the_early_Buddhist_teachings.

Bhikkhu Bodhi's (2009)[25] "*Going for Refuge & Taking the Precepts*" provides an in-depth exploration of two fundamental aspects of being a lay Buddhist disciple: taking refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) and taking the Five Precepts. Taking Refuge is described as a commitment to accept the Three Jewels as the guiding ideals in life. The text elaborates on the reasons for taking refuge, such as the dangers of existence, identifying the object of refuge, and the action itself, including both an external declaration and an internal spiritual commitment. The Five Precepts represent the ethical principles that a practitioner commits to follow, including abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and the use of intoxicants. The significance of these precepts is discussed in terms of their benefits for both present and future lives, as well as their potential to lead to ultimate good. Throughout the text, Bodhi emphasizes the importance of both practices as foundational steps on the Buddhist path, noting that they should be reaffirmed frequently and practiced diligently for personal development and spiritual growth. This work is both an introductory guide for new practitioners and a reflective resource for long-time Buddhists.

The *"The Five Precepts: Collected Essays"* is a collection of essays authored by Dr. Dahlke et al. (2008)[26]. In his essay, Dr. Paul Dahlke explains that the five precepts are self-given rules rather than divine commandments. They are intended to encourage ethical conformity based on personal reflection and thought. Dr. Dahlke draws a contrast between Buddhist precepts and Judaeo-Christian commandments, noting that Buddhist guidelines are characterized by their clarity and focus on personal responsibility. He emphasizes the importance of developing a practical philosophy of life in order to understand the meaning of an action. Dr. Dahlke

[25] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Going for Refuge and Taking the Precepts*, BPS Online (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2009).
[26] Paul Dahlke et al., *The Five Precepts: Collected Essays*, BPS Online (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008).

encourages readers to engage in the practice of kindness, not only for personal benefit but also for the greater good of society and to ensure favorable rebirths. He advocates abstaining from violence, theft, blind sensuality, false speech, and intoxication, asserting that giving teaching is the most meaningful and beneficial action, promoting internal enrichment. Bhikkhu Sīlācāra offers a perspective that taking precepts serves as a reminder of ethical conduct leading to happiness and nibbāna, rather than a magical solution to life's problems. He stresses the need to actively observe the precepts, drawing an analogy to boarding a train after purchasing a ticket for a journey. The author likens knowledge of the path (Sīla) to a map, asserting that simply knowing the way is not enough without actively walking it. Oates discusses the universality of ethical codes across religions. He observes that while their doctrinal theories may vary, their ethical formulations often address similar social challenges. Oates argues that the Buddha's ethical principles are essential to achieving enlightenment and enhancing happiness throughout the cycle of birth and death. He emphasizes that before moral behavior, a person's thoughts and actions are influenced by greed, hatred, and delusion, making it crucial to awaken to the understanding of moral causality. Lounsbery emphasizes that while the five precepts may seem simple, they require deep reflection on their significance in promoting abstinence from evil and alleviating suffering. He argues that attaining right views and practicing mindfulness are essential to the daily application of these precepts. Lounsbery emphasizes that observing the precepts cultivates qualities such as loving-kindness (Mettā), justice, self-control, truthfulness, and avoidance of harmful habits, which benefit both the individual and society as a whole.

In his book, *The Noble Eightfold Path and Its Factors Explained*, Venerable Ledi Sayādaw (2008)[27] provides a comprehensive explanation of the core teachings of Buddhism.

[27] Ledi Sayādaw, *The Noble Eightfold Path and Its Factors Explained (Maggaṅga-Dīpanī)* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008).

Central to Buddhist teachings are the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. A correct understanding of these concepts without personal distortion or misinterpretation is essential, as the Buddha's explanations stem from his incomparably perfect Enlightenment and are clear and convincing. The author emphasizes the integration of the Four Noble Truths into one's understanding and practice, focusing specifically on the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of eight components: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Right View is fundamental, recognizing that all beings are the owners of their karma (actions), meaning that individuals are responsible for the intentions behind their actions. Karma shapes experiences throughout life, creating a connection between past actions and one's present circumstances. The author emphasizes the importance of moral responsibility, asserting that positive actions lead to beneficial results, while negative actions lead to suffering. The author outlines seven key aspects of Right View that guide individuals to recognize the ethical implications of their actions, including the importance of kindness to parents and an understanding of spiritual existence. The author also discusses the concept of karma in relation to various religious frameworks, emphasizing the unique Buddhist perspective that emphasizes personal responsibility as opposed to relying solely on divine forces. By outlining the practices necessary to establish each element of the Noble Eightfold Path, the author promotes a holistic approach to living wisely and ethically. Ultimately, the teachings aim to lead practitioners to liberation from suffering and the cyclical nature of existence. His book serves as a practical handbook for those on the Buddhist path, emphasizing the need for diligent practice along with intellectual understanding.

In the chapter "Five Precepts (Pañcasila)" of his *Buddhism Course* book, San (2006)[28] explores the essential guidelines for ethical conduct for lay practitioners. These precepts focus on abstaining from five specific vices: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and drunkenness. The Buddha taught that these vices can lead to negative outcomes, including rebirth in hell. Conversely, practicing the five virtues will foster self-confidence and lead to rebirth in a more fortunate life. The Five Precepts are the core of moral discipline and are obligatory for all lay practitioners, usually taken after reciting the Three Refuges. Each precept involves a commitment to abstain from specific actions, emphasizing personal responsibility and moral training. Regular practice of these precepts is essential to cultivating a moral character and overcoming defilements. Reflecting on one's actions, especially in relation to the suffering of others, is an important aspect of understanding why abstinence is important, including the first precept against killing, which requires awareness of the life and intentions behind actions. Each principle highlights the ethical implications of behavior and encourages respectful relationships. The document critiques the idea of 'moderate drinking', references research that challenges claims of health benefits from alcohol, and illustrates potential dangers through real-life examples. Several spiritual factors support adherence to the principles, including moral shame, fear, faith, understanding, mindfulness, effort, and patience. These qualities deter immoral behavior and reinforce moral behavior.

The article *"Religiosity, Religious Participation, and Negative Prison Behaviors"* by Kerley, Blanchard and Matthews (2005)[29] examines the relationship between religiosity, religious participation, and negative behavior among prisoners, focusing specifically on how

[28] Chan Khoon San, *Buddhism Course* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Subang Jaya Buddhist Association, 2006).
[29] Kent R. Kerley, Todd L. Matthews, and Troy C. Blanchard, "Religiosity, Religious Participation, and Negative Prison Behaviors," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4 (2005): 443–57, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2005.00296.x.

these factors may reduce instances of arguing and fighting. Conducted at a prison facility in the southeast, the authors use survey data collected from a random sample of prisoners to assess whether higher levels of religiosity could reduce antisocial behavior in the prison environment. The findings show that religiosity had a significant impact. It directly reduces the likelihood of prisoners arguing and indirectly reduces the likelihood of physical fighting. This suggests that the effectiveness of religious programs in prisons depends on their ability to promote prosocial behavior among prisoners. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of faith-based programs in correctional settings as an inexpensive and effective alternative to traditional treatment programs. These programs can serve as a mechanism through which inmates internalize positive social norms, fostering kindness and empathy. By strengthening social networks and providing emotional support, religion can help inmates take responsibility for their actions and develop a moral outlook on life. The authors collect data from a survey involving 875 randomly selected inmates at the Mississippi State Prison. The survey covers a variety of aspects, including family background, religious beliefs, criminal history, and negative behavior. The results show that a significant proportion of inmates reported frequent arguments and fights, with notable demographic patterns observed. This study provides strong support for the thesis that religion can play an important role in reducing antisocial behavior, even in the challenging environment of prison. The findings suggest that by promoting basic social interactions and reducing the frequency of negative behaviors such as quarreling, religiosity holds significant promise for improving relationships between prisoners and overall prison dynamics. It highlights the need for faith-based prison programs that focus not only on spiritual development but also on promoting positive relationships between prisoners and building constructive behavioral norms. Looking forward, it is clear that more research is needed to explore the long-term effects of

religiosity in the prison contexts and its potential transitional effects on prisoners after release. Investigating how religious involvement influences attitudes and behaviors over time could lead to more effective rehabilitation strategies that address not only in-prison behavior but also the reintegration of former inmates into society. Such research could ultimately pave the way for a more nuanced understanding of the role of faith in criminal justice, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of rehabilitation programs and contributing to lower recidivism rates. By paying close attention to the interplay between religiosity and behavior, correctional systems may find a valuable ally in religion, not only as a means of personal transformation while incarcerated but also as a catalyst for positive change throughout society upon release.

In the lecture *"Buddhist Propagation for World Peace,"* Venerable Dharmakosajarn (2000)[30] emphasizes the global importance of propagating Buddhism as a means to achieve world peace. It emphasizes that Buddhism, which originated in India more than 2,500 years ago, has spread across different regions and cultures through the dedicated efforts of Buddhist leaders and followers. The propagation of Buddhism is seen as a compassionate mission aimed at alleviating suffering and extending the benefits of the Buddha's teachings to all living beings. Buddhist monks responsible for propagating the Buddha's teachings are encouraged to do so with a heart of genuine concern for the happiness and well-being of all people. Their approach should be persuasive and understanding, avoiding force or violence. The teachings of Buddhism advocate the propagation of peace, emphasizing that the ultimate goal is to establish peace and harmony within each individual and in society as a whole. In addition, the author emphasizes the deep connection between Buddhism and nature, closely linked to trees and natural settings that are conducive to meditation and spiritual practice. He encourages an attitude of respect and

[30] Phra Dharmakosajarn, "Buddhist Propagation for World Peace" (Second World Buddhist Propagation Conference, Buddhamonthon, Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2000).

gratitude towards nature, promoting the development of responsibility, compassion and wisdom among Buddhists. Finally, the author emphasizes the importance of unity within the global Buddhist community to effectively promote these ideals. Proper Buddhist education, academic cooperation and the establishment of organized platforms such as the World Buddhist Propagation Conference are considered essential steps to achieve this unity. Strengthening the unity of the Buddhist world is considered crucial to promote the common goal of fostering peace and harmony both within and outside the religion.

Kleck and Patterson's study (1993)[31] *"The Impact of Gun Control and Gun Ownership Levels on Violence Rates"* explores the complex relationship between gun control laws, gun ownership levels, and violence rates. Their analysis includes data from 170 U.S. cities with populations greater than 100,000 in 1980, focusing on 19 major types of gun restrictions, including both state and city-level regulations. They use a two-stage least squares approach to estimate patterns of violence within cities across a variety of intentional crimes that typically involve guns, such as homicide, suicide, fatal gun accidents, robbery, aggravated assault, and rape. The study also considers multiple indirect indicators of gun prevalence to analyze how these variables relate to each other. The findings from their study suggest that overall gun prevalence does not have a significant positive effect on overall violence rates. However, some violent events such as homicides, assaults with guns, and rapes are associated with increases in gun prevalence. Interestingly, most gun control restrictions do not significantly affect gun prevalence and, therefore, tend not to significantly affect violence rates. Despite these general trends, there are some notable exceptions: of the 108 assessments of the effects of different gun laws on different types of violence, seven found strong support and eleven found partial support

[31] Gary Kleck and E. Britt Patterson, "The Impact of Gun Control and Gun Ownership Levels on Violence Rates," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 9, no. 3 (1993): 249–87.

for the effectiveness of some gun control measures in reducing violence. Furthermore, research has examined whether gun restrictions affect violence through their impact on gun availability. The results show that most gun restrictions do not produce a net reduction in the level of guns held by the public, nor do they have a significant effect on overall violence rates. However, the authors acknowledge that certain laws may still be effective under specific conditions, although their overall conclusion is that gun control measures have minimal effects on reducing violence. This nuanced view highlights the complexity of establishing a direct causal relationship between gun laws, gun ownership, and violent crime, given the many factors involved in this social issue.

"The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom" translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita (1985)[32]. This particular work is significant because it serves as a foundational text in the study and practice of Theravada Buddhism. The Dhammapada is recognized as a key work in the Pali Tipitaka. It presents a collection of verses attributed to the Buddha that serve as the foundational teachings of early Buddhism. The verses are organized into 26 chapters that cover a wide range of topics, including the nature of the mind, the difference between the wise and the foolish, and ethical teachings on compassion, happiness, and the human condition. Themes such as evil, violence, old age, self-reflection, and the path to enlightenment are also explored, guiding the reader toward ethical living and spiritual growth. The verses not only provide guidance on right living, but also promise liberation and happiness to those who practice the teachings seriously. As Bhikkhu Bodhi describes it in the introduction, the Dhammapada serves as a concise expression of the Buddha's teachings, considered the essential spiritual testament of early Buddhism. The title "Dhammapada" itself translates as "portions" or "sections" of the Dhamma, reflecting its encompassing nature that covers many aspects of the

[32] Acharya Buddharakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985).

Buddha's teachings. The text presents four levels of teaching, beginning with basic ethical conduct for establishing happiness in human relationships. The second level emphasizes the law of Kamma, in which morally determined actions lead to corresponding results in life and rebirth. The third level introduces the theoretical framework necessary to achieve ultimate liberation from suffering, based on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The chapters continue to analyze broad themes, including the significance of mindfulness, the dangers of mindless existence, the importance of self-control, and the pursuit of wisdom. Throughout, the Dhammapada encourages a disciplined approach to life, urging people to recognize the fleeting nature of existence and overcome negative traits such as anger, greed, and ignorance. Each chapter concludes with reflections aimed at enhancing personal insight and spiritual progress, ultimately leading to the serene state of Nibbana, as exemplified by the Arahat, the perfect one who has transcended worldly attachments.

In the article *"Teaching Buddhism in Several California State Prisons in the Age of the Internet Plus"* Dr. Hong (Unk)[33] discusses the challenges and opportunities of teaching Buddhism in California state prisons, emphasizing the importance of education in the context of mass incarceration and high recidivism rates. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has recognized the effectiveness of educational programs, including those offered by community colleges and religious organizations such as the Engaged Buddhist Alliance (EBA), an organization that actively provides Buddhist teachings, meditation, and mindfulness practices to incarcerated people. By providing Buddhist teachings and mindfulness practices, these programs not only offer tools for personal transformation and growth but also promote a sense of inner peace and self-awareness that can be beneficial in navigating the

[33] De Hong, "Teaching Buddhism in Several California State Prisons in the Age of the Internet Plus," Unk.

challenges of prison life. The potential for expanding these educational opportunities to more inmates across the country could have a significant impact on reducing recidivism rates and fostering positive change within the prison system.

The literature review identified a large body of literature on Buddhism and crime in society while noting a significant gap in the literature on the application of Buddhism to American society. This highlights the need for further exploration in the broader expansion of Buddhism to reduce crime and bring peace to society.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is a literary analysis of original texts, statistical data from reliable sources, such as government reports or crime databases. The research is also carried out on the basis of applying the interdisciplinary combination of sociology, criminology, and religious ethics. Reputable academic sources and websites are used to gather information on the historical context and significance of these precepts in Buddhist teachings. This included translation works, historical investigations, and critical commentary analyzing the philosophical principles of the Five Precepts.

Primary Texts

This research relied on primary resources such as Encyclopedias, Canonical literature, Commentaries. The texts are as follows: (1) *Abhisanda Sutta: Rewards* (AN 8.39), (2) *Dhammapada* (Dhp). Both of these texts are from the Pali Canon.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS FROM PRIOR RESEARCH

4.1 Origin of The Precepts.

The five precepts are common to most schools of Buddhism. The five precepts are based on the pañcaśīla, pre-Buddhist Brahmin prohibitions, which were adopted in many Indian religions around the 6th century BCE. The first four Buddhist precepts are almost identical to these pañcaśīla, but the fifth precept, the prohibition on intoxication, is new to Buddhism. In the early Buddhist scriptures, the precepts were associated with a declaration of faith in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, his teachings, and the monastic community). The precepts evolved to become the basis of lay practice. The precepts were seen as a prerequisite for further development of the mind. Eventually, the precepts, along with the Three Jewels, became a requirement for Buddhist practice, as laypeople had to undergo a formal initiation ceremony to become members of the Buddhist religion.[34]

The Buddha's teachings of the Five Precepts were found in AN 8.39 Abhisanda Sutta, translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu:[35]

> "Monks, there are these eight rewards of merit, rewards of skillfulness, nourishments of happiness, celestial, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven, leading to what is desirable, pleasurable, & appealing, to welfare & happiness. Which eight?
> "There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones has gone to the Buddha for refuge. This is the first reward of merit, reward of skillfulness, nourishment of happiness, celestial, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven, leading to what is desirable, pleasurable, & appealing; to welfare & to happiness.
> "Furthermore, the disciple of the noble ones has gone to the Dhamma for refuge. This is the second reward of merit...
> "Furthermore, the disciple of the noble ones has gone to the Sangha for refuge. This is the third reward of merit...
> "Now, there are these five gifts, five great gifts — original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning — that are not open to

[34] Wikipedia contributors, "Five Precepts," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, accessed May 4, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Five_precepts&oldid=1288751536.
[35] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Abhisanda Sutta: Rewards (AN 8.39)," Access to Insight, 2013, https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.039.than.html.

suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and are unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans. Which five?

"There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from taking life. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the first gift, the first great gift — original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning — that is not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and is unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans. And this is the fourth reward of merit...

"Furthermore, abandoning taking what is not given (stealing), the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking what is not given. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the second gift, the second great gift... and this is the fifth reward of merit...

"Furthermore, abandoning illicit sex, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from illicit sex. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the third gift, the third great gift... and this is the sixth reward of merit...

"Furthermore, abandoning lying, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from lying. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the fourth gift, the fourth great gift... and this is the seventh reward of merit...

"Furthermore, abandoning the use of intoxicants, the disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking intoxicants. In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. This is the fifth gift, the fifth great gift — original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning — that is not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and is unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives & brahmans. And this is the eighth reward of merit, reward of skillfulness, nourishment of happiness, celestial, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven, leading to what is desirable, pleasurable, & appealing; to welfare & to happiness.

4.2 Ethical Guidelines of the Five Precepts

The Five Precepts in Buddhism are the fundamental moral compass that lay Buddhists strive to maintain in their daily lives. These precepts serve as a guide for lay Buddhists, helping them to distinguish right from wrong. By practicing these precepts, individuals aim to cultivate mindfulness, compassion and ethical conduct, contributing to their personal growth and the happiness of those around them. The Five Precepts (Pañca Sīla)[36]are as follows:

1. *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

2. *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.

3. *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

4. *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech.

5. *Suramerayamajja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

The Five Precepts are not to be seen as rigid commandments but as gentle reminders to guide one's intentions and actions towards a more ethical life. Dr. Paul Dahlke (2008) states, "These precepts are not commandments in the Christian sense. There is no divine law-giver who raises a threatening finger from behind the clouds. These precepts are self-given rules of conduct, which the individual voluntarily accepts and endeavors to keep, not to please a God, but for

[36] Access to Insight, "The Five Precepts: Pañca-Sila," Access to Insight, 2013, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html.

bringing himself morally into conformity with the results of his thinking."[37] To become a Buddhist, after taking refuge in the Triple Gem, one must live according to the rules that the Buddha established, in order to progress on the path of the Dharma. As Bhikkhu Bodhi (2009) explains:

> The first two steps in the process of becoming a lay disciple of the Buddha are the going for refuge *(sarana gamana)* and the undertaking of the five precepts *(pañca-sila samadana).* By the former step a person makes the commitment to accept the Triple Gem — the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha — as the guiding ideals of his life, by the latter he expresses his determination to bring his actions into harmony with these ideals through right conduct."[38]

Those who have taken refuge in the Triple Gem have stepped onto the ladder of liberation, but if they do not practice the Five Precepts, they have only taken the first step and then stopped, unable to reach true liberation. According to Bhikkhu Sīlācāra (2008), "The precepts, in short, are no magical formula or spell by the mere utterance of which great and miraculous results are to be achieved. They are purely and simply a reminder to the layman of what he must do as he mixes in the life of the great world, so that he may avoid putting any obstacles or hindrances on his path towards the Beyond-of-Life."[39] These Five Precepts not only help people progress on the path to liberation, but also bring order, happiness, and peace to the family, the nation, and

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[37] Paul Dahlke et al., *The Five Precepts: Collected Essays*, BPS Online (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008), p.6.
[38] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Going for Refuge and Taking the Precepts*, BPS Online (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2009), p.3.
[39] Paul Dahlke et al., *The Five Precepts: Collected Essays*, BPS Online (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008), p.17-18.

society. The following is an excerpt from the lecture on the Five Precepts by Venerable Thich Thien Hoa (1997).[40]

1. The First Precept: Refrain from Killing

Buddha advises us is not to kill lives, from humans to animals. Life is a precious value, especially human life; killing another life to enrich one's own life is an evil thing, not in accordance with morality. Not only not killing but also not causing pain to humans and other species. Buddhists also do not tell others, or plot for others to do things that torture or kill living beings of all species. When seeing others beating and killing humans and animals, they should feel compassion and advise and stop them. Buddhism prohibits killing for many reasons:

a) Respect for justice: We know how to value our lives; why would we want to trample on other lives? If someone tries to harm us, we will fight back completely to protect our lives. Animals also know how to value their lives. When their head was smashed, we see their fierce resistance, their extreme pain, with their screams, their struggles to escape death. According to justice, what we do not want others to do to us, we should not do to others, or other species.

b) Respecting the Buddha nature equally: Although we have different physical forms, we still have the same Buddha nature. Since Buddha nature is equal, there is no reason to say that Buddha nature in humans is more valuable than in animals, or that this race or skin color is more valuable than that race or skin color.

[40] Thich Thien Hoa, "The Five Precepts," Buddhism Today, 1997, https://www.buddhismtoday.com/viet/batdau/gioi-14-ngugioi.htm.

c) Nurturing compassion: The Buddha's compassion regards all living beings as equal, so he does not agree to let his disciples kill living beings, under any circumstances. Because killing a living being is the ultimate cruelty, and compassion is crushed. Killing another is to kill one's own compassion, to suffocate the precious seed of love in our souls.

2. The Second Precept: Refrain from Taking What Is Not Given

Not stealing means not taking what is not given, from houses, fields, gardens, property, money to small personal belongings. We do not want anyone to encroach on our property, and we must not snatch or secretly take other people's property. Because snatching or secretly taking other people's property is an act against humanity, against the law of the government, and must be punished. Stealing is due to greed, cruelty, only thinking of one's own benefit, forgetting the suffering of others, losing both justice and humanity. Buddhists must not give others plans to steal. When they see others stealing, they must advise and rebuke them. Buddhism prohibits stealing for the following reasons:

a) Respect for fairness: We do not want anyone to take what is ours. We respect our own personal property rights, so why we trample on other people's property rights. Doing so is against fairness. A society that lacks fairness cannot last long.

b) Respect for equality: Everyone has the same Buddha nature; why do we want to make others suffer to make ourselves happy? We are often sad because of losing our belongings, and the same goes for others. We do not want anyone to steal from us, so we should not steal from others, that is justice.

c) Nurturing compassion: Once we accidentally lose something or money, we feel sad, can't sleep well, why do we have the heart to take someone else's things and make them

cry and suffer because of us? As Buddhists, we are trying to nurture compassion, we cannot steal from anyone.

3. The Third Precept: Refrain from Sexual Misconduct

Adultery means immoral and illegal sexual intercourse. It means not seducing or using tricks to steal another person's wife or husband, not forcing another person to satisfy their sexual desires, not raping women or girls. The law teaches that those who have left the secular life must completely stop sexual intercourse, while lay people are not allowed to commit adultery. In addition, secretly having an illegal affair with a person of the opposite sex is called improper. Buddhists are not allowed to incite or plot for others to commit adultery. When we know someone is committing adultery, we must advise and condemn them. Buddhism prohibits adultery for the following reasons:

a) Respect for fairness: Everyone wants their family to be warm, happy, their wife and children to be virtuous, so why would they destroy their family, humiliate other people's clans, and lead other people's wives and children into the path of adultery.

b) Protecting family happiness: Nothing is more painful than a family in which the husband or wife has a private, perverse heart. There is no happiness when the husband and wife do not trust each other. Once the family falls into that situation, their reputation will be tarnished.

c) Not committing adultery protects justice, protects the happiness of one's family and the family of others, not committing adultery also avoids resentment and bad karma, because there is no hatred as strong as the hatred caused by cheating or betrayal. Among all grudges, there is no grudge as fierce as the grudge caused by deceit and betrayal in love. Murders that occur every day are mostly the result of sexual misconduct. If everyone

observes the precept of not committing adultery, the family will be warm, the society will have morality, there will be no more hatred and death due to adultery.

4. The Fourth Precept: Refrain from Lying and Harmful Speech

Lying and harmful speech could cause listeners to be sad and act wrongly. There are four ways to tell untruths: lying, exaggerating, saying two-sided words, and speaking harshly.

a) Telling lies is not telling the truth, saying what is true is not true, saying what is not true is true, saying what is right is wrong, saying what is wrong is right; saying what is heard is not heard, saying what is not heard is heard; or praising in front of the face and criticizing behind the back; or saying sweet and fragrant things when liked, but bitter and sour things when disliked.

b) Exaggerating is to exaggerate a little, making the listener angry; is to polish words, refine the voice, raise and lower the voice to make it easier to hear, easier to please the listener, to make the listener fascinated; is to speak sarcastically, making the listener suffer. In short, all the words that are not true, added or subtracted, even the frivolous and glossy words that makes the listener confused and upset, are called fabrications.

c) Saying two-sided words, making two people hate each other. That is, when going to this place, one agrees with this side to speak ill of the other side, when going to the other side, one agrees with that side to speak ill of this side, causing close friends to turn against each other, the benevolent and righteous people to oppose and hate each other.

d) Speaking cruel words is speaking vulgar, harsh, cursing words, causing the listener to suffer, be sad, and be afraid.

Buddha forbids telling lies for the following reasons:

a) Respecting the truth: Buddhist practitioners must respect the truth. Those who are used to lying and do not seek the truth will find it difficult to attain enlightenment. Lying is living in delusion. The main task of practitioners is to try to destroy that delusion. If we cannot do so but instead pile up that delusion with more lies and deception, then it is against the Dharma.

b) Nurturing compassion: The main motive of lying is selfishness, cruelty and the desire to harm others to satisfy one's dark desires. Those who are deceived and cheated suffer because of us, sometimes suffer hatred and resentment, sometimes lose family and property. Such deceivers have lost their conscience and have killed the compassion in their hearts. Once compassion is gone, that is, the main motivation is gone, then spiritual practice is just a lie, a deception, and of course, it will never have good results.

c) Preserving loyalty in society: In a family, a group, a society where no one trusts anyone, everything, from small to large, will fail. Family and social happiness cannot be achieved through lies, suspicion and jealousy.

5. The Fifth Precept: Refrain from Intoxicants

Anything containing alcohol, stimulants, and addictive substances that cause intoxication or poison should not be consumed. Not only should one not drink it oneself, but one should also not force others to drink it. Forcing or encouraging others to drink is a greater sin than drinking it oneself. The Buddha forbids drinking alcohol for the following reasons:

a) Preserving the seed of wisdom: Alcohol is more dangerous than poison. Drinking alcohol destroys the seed of wisdom, causing us to lose mindfulness and responsibility.

b) Preventing the causes of sin: Alcohol itself is not a sin like killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct, but it can be the cause for other sins to arise. When one drinks alcohol and gets drunk, any sin can be committed.

4.3 Benefits of The Five Precepts

The Five Precepts bring many benefits to practitioners. They can help nurture and develop wholesome seeds in our minds to overcome gross defilements. According to Chan Khoon San (2006), "The actions prohibited by the precepts such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and partaking of intoxicants are all rooted in greed, hatred and delusion and when we succumb to them, we strengthen these evil roots that they become dominant traits. By undertaking to observe the precepts, we weaken the grip of these evil roots by dispelling them with wholesome mental volitions."[41] The Five Precepts serve as a fundamental framework for moral training and self-improvement among lay practitioners. Each of these precepts not only represents a commandment to avoid certain actions but also emphasizes the importance of cultivating a wholesome mindset, which contributing towards moral training and self-improvement in several ways. Through an emphasis on ethical conduct, cultivation of virtues, self-responsibility, mindfulness, habitual practice, and community influence, these precepts guide individuals on a path toward greater personal development and happiness.

1. Ethical Conduct

The Five Precepts represent the core ethical framework for lay Buddhists. By providing clear guidelines on actions to avoid, they establish a foundational structure for ethical living. This structure is especially important for individuals dealing with the complexities of everyday life, where ethical dilemmas and challenges frequently arise. By observing these precepts,

[41] Chan Khoon San, *Buddhism Course* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Subang Jaya Buddhist Association, 2006). P.147

individuals are guided away from harmful actions that can lead to negative outcomes not only for themselves but also for society.

2. Cultivation of Virtues

Each of the Five Precepts corresponds to a specific moral virtue, essential for personal growth and social harmony. For example, the first precept encourages non-killing, promoting compassion and empathy. The second precept, focusing on not taking what is not given, encourages respect for the property and rights of others. The third precept, warning against sexual misconduct, advocates fidelity and the expression of wholesome love. The fourth precept emphasizes the importance of honesty, fostering integrity and trustworthiness. Finally, the fifth precept discourages intoxication, helping to foster mindfulness and clarity of thought. By embodying these virtues, individuals promote personal and moral growth, combating negative traits such as greed, hatred and delusion, which often lead to unhappiness and suffering.

3. Self-Responsibility

Importantly, the Five Precepts embody the principle of self-responsibility. Unlike external commandments imposed by authority figures, these precepts are seen as voluntary commitments that individuals make for self-improvement. This self-directed approach empowers practitioners to take responsibility for their own moral formation and ethical decisions. By realizing that their actions have direct consequences, individuals become more responsible, not only for their behavior but also for their mental and emotional well-being. This self-responsibility fosters a sense of agency, encouraging individuals to actively pursue personal growth rather than passively relying on external blessings.

4. Mindfulness

Practicing the Five Precepts inherently encourages mindfulness, as adherence requires an individual to be deeply aware of one's thoughts, intentions, and actions. Regularly reflecting on how one's actions affect not only oneself but also others can enhance understanding and appreciation of ethical behavior. The mindfulness cultivated through the precepts also promotes emotional regulation, allowing individuals to make ethical decisions guided by compassion rather than impulse.

5. Habitual Practice

Another important aspect of the Five Precepts is the cultivation of good habits through repeated practice. By consistently maintaining these precepts, ethical behavior is transformed into a habit, becoming second nature over time. The process of repetition infuses ethical behavior into one's lifestyle, strengthening positive mental dispositions and gradually leading to self-improvement. As individuals practice the precepts more frequently, they strengthen their commitment to ethical living and create a positive environment that enhances their ethical character.

6. Influence on Community

Individual adherence to the Five Precepts has a wider impact on the well-being of the community. When individuals practice these precepts, they contribute to a collective moral standard within their community. This leads to a more compassionate and harmonious society where compassion, understanding and concern for one another flourish. Such an environment fosters interpersonal relationships characterized by mutual respect and trust, ultimately benefiting all involved and creating a supportive and harmonious community.

4.4 Ineffective Gun Control: Mass Shooting

1. The Five Precepts and Corresponding Crimes

The analysis and discussion of the five precepts in the previous chapter shows that Buddhist precepts are guidelines for moral behavior. The precepts include not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not using intoxicants. The precepts provide a moral framework that directly addresses many potential criminal behaviors. Here is a breakdown of how they relate to potential crimes:

Not killing:

This corresponds to crimes of violence, such as murder, assault, and even negligence resulting in death.

Not stealing:

This relates to property crimes, including burglary, break-in, petty theft, and robbery.

Not committing sexual misconduct:

This is relevant to sexual crimes such as rape, sexual assault, and other forms of sexual abuse.

Not lying:

Although not a direct crime, lying can be a component of crimes such as fraud, deception, false statements and perjury.

Not using intoxicants:

Although not a crime in itself, intoxication can be a contributing factor in many types of crime, intoxication can impair judgment and lead to criminal behavior including drunk driving and drug-related crimes, violence, and other crimes.

The five moral principles of the precepts can reduce many types of crime. To support my thesis argument, I chose a mass shooting to analyze and discuss the causes and prevention by gun control policies.

2. Potential Causes of Mass Shooting

a. Unsecured Storage of Firearms

Gun storage practices play a crucial role in determining the potential for children to find and misuse firearms, with unsafe storage contributing directly to alarming statistics related to gun injuries and fatalities among minors. When guns are kept unlocked or stored in easily reachable locations, children may find them out of curiosity or play, leading to severe consequences such as unintentional shootings or firearm-related injuries. The dangers of children accidentally accessing guns are very serious. From 2015 to 2022, in the United States at least 2,802 shootings occurred where children under 18 held guns and resulted in 1,083 deaths and 1,815 nonfatal gun injuries. During this time, 895 preschoolers and toddlers found and fired guns, injuring themselves or others. In addition to accidents, the presence of guns significantly increases the risk of suicide in young people. With guns in the home, the rate of suicide in children would increase four times compared to families without guns. In the past decade alone, guns have caused 40% of teen suicides, with 90% of these suicides using weapons from their own home or from a relative's home.[42](Schaechter, 2024) How do children and teenagers get guns to carry out shootings? A 2015 survey of nearly 4,000 American adults found a disturbing trend in the safe storage of firearms, specifically in homes with children. Parents, especially mothers, who own handguns for protection tend to store their guns unsafely. About 4.6 million children in the U.S. live in households with at least one loaded gun within easy reach. The careless storage of these guns has led to unthinkable suffering such as school massacres, teen suicides, and the deaths of family members of all ages.[43](Azrael et al., 2018) This indicates that children's access to guns is a major cause of the overall increase in shootings among children.

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[42] Judy Schaechter, "Guns in the Home: How to Keep Kids Safe," *American Academy of Pediatrics*, June 24, 2024, https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Handguns-in-the-Home.aspx.
[43] Deborah Azrael et al., "Firearm Storage in Gun-Owning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey," *Journal of Urban Health* 95 (2018): 295–304.

b. Gun Ownership

Why do Americans buy and keep guns in their homes? It's essential to understand the motivations behind American gun ownership. Many Americans cite personal protection as their primary reason for acquiring a firearm. Gun ownership has been widely perceived as a means of self-defense against potential threats, including home intrusions. According to Jason Riley (2022), "personal safety tops the list of why people decide to buy a firearm. In a 2021 Gallup survey, 88% of respondents said they own a gun 'for protection against crime,' which is up from 67% in 2005."[44] Many Americans believe that owning a gun makes them feel safer and able to defend themselves, their homes, and their families.

Moreover, cultural attitudes toward gun ownership play a significant role in this decision. For some, owning a gun is seen as a constitutional right and an essential part of their identity and lifestyle. Influenced by societal norms and peer opinions, many Americans may feel pressured to keep guns in their homes to align with the values and practices of their community. However, this desire for safety often contrasts sharply with the risks associated with firearm accessibility, particularly concerning children.

c. Mental Health

The discussion of mental health in relation to active shooters highlights the complexity surrounding the issue. Mental health is recognized as a significant stressor that can impact individuals, but it should not be equated with a mental illness diagnosis. According to James Silver, et al. (2018), "The stressor "mental health" indicates that the active shooter appeared to be struggling with (most commonly) depression, anxiety, paranoia, etc. in their daily life in the

[44] Jason Riley, "Why Americans Are Buying Guns," *Manhattan Institute*, September 5, 2022, https://manhattan.institute/multimedia/prageru-why-americans-are-buying-guns.

year before the attack."[45] However, these symptoms do not necessarily meet the criteria for a formal mental illness diagnosis. FBI findings indicate that only 25% of active shooters were diagnosed with a mental illness prior to their crimes[46], suggesting that a significant portion of cases do not have a definitive mental health evaluation. Among those who are diagnosed, the conditions vary, with mood disorders being the most common. Notably, being diagnosed with a mental illness was correlated with a higher prevalence of additional mental health stressors. Furthermore, the majority of active shooters faced multiple stressors prior to their attacks, including financial pressures and interpersonal conflicts. The study highlights the importance of considering these stressors and the shooter's resilience in assessing the threat. Given the widespread prevalence of mental health symptoms in the general population, simply attributing violent behavior to mental illness is misleading. This suggests that a deeper understanding of social and contextual factors is needed before concluding that mental health issues directly cause violent behavior.

d. Violence in the Media

The pervasive presence of violence in contemporary media and the profound impact it has on society. Despite the advances we have made in many aspects of human life, including technology, communication, and social awareness, violence remains a major and troubling theme in media coverage across the globe. From broadcast news to movies and social media platforms, violent events are regularly highlighted, shaping public discourse and perceptions. This constant exposure to violence not only contributes to the normalization of aggressive behavior, but also

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[45] James Silver, Andre Simons, and Sarah Craun, *A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States between 2000–2013* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 2018), p.17.

[46] James Silver, Andre Simons, and Sarah Craun, *A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States between 2000–2013*, 2018), p.7.

influences how individuals experience and interpret distressing events and conflicts in their daily lives. The media could impact on mental health and lead to copycat. According to Jenna Berkwit (2022):

> Media coverage of mass shootings and other exceptionally violent events not only incite fear, but at times perpetuate further violence. The near constant airing of violent and graphic images, the multiple mentions of the shooter's name, and other repeated details of the event such as the weapon used can lead to copycat or similar incidents within the first 14 days after the original event.[47]

3. Ineffective Gun Control

Mass shootings in the United States are alarmingly frequent. Brian Duignan (2016) emphasized:

> In the United States, mass murders committed with guns are so frequent that the vast majority of them are not even mentioned in mainstream media outlets. Those that happen to be massive or heinous enough to gain national attention - including the murder of 49 people in an Orlando nightclub in 2016 and the massacre of 20 children and six adults at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012 - typically spark a short-lived and fruitless debate about the need for stricter gun control.[48]

Although the government has made efforts to create many laws to control guns to minimize mass shootings, these efforts have not brought about positive results. Gary Kleck, et al. (2016) concluded, "For the most part, the evidence fails to support the hypothesis that gun control laws

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[47] Jenna Berkwit, "Media Impact on Mental Health: How Exposure to Mass Violence in the Media Can Negatively Impact Your Mental Health and What to Do About It," *Magellan Federal*, 2022, https://www.magellanfederal.com/whats-new/mfed-inform/media-impact-on-mental-health/.

[48] Brian Duignan, "Gun Control in the U.S.," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 18, 2016, https://www.britannica.com/story/gun-control-in-the-us.

reduce violent crime."[49] In addition, most studies also confirmed this ineffectiveness, according to John C. Moorhouse and Brent Wanner (2006), "As part of this larger survey, the authors review 13 studies that use state data. They observe that two studies find that gun controls reduce violent crimes, two have mixed results, and nine find no reduction in crime because of gun control (Kleck and Patterson 1993: 254)."[50]

4.5 Positive Impact of the Five Precepts on Society

There are many studies show that the Five Precepts bring many benefits and peace to those who keep them. Among the studies, the most notable is that of Jared Nelson (2018). He compared Louisiana and Bhutan in many aspects such as constitution and government structure, law enforcement, and criminal code etc. to find out the similarities between the two societies. Then he analyzed the collected data and showed that "Louisiana has been known to have the highest incarceration rate per capita in the world."[51] and "As Buddhism is the religion that is practiced throughout the [Bhutan] country, religion plays a role in the low crime rate in the country. Buddhism has 5 precepts for which all Buddhist try to live their lives by."[52] Thus, the more people in a society follow the moral guidance of the Five Precepts, the more morality of that society will be enhanced and result in a reduction of crime.

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[49] Gary Kleck, Tomislav Kovandzic, and Jon Bellows, "Does Gun Control Reduce Violent Crime?," *Criminal Justice Review* 41, no. 4 (2016): 488–513, https://doi.org/10.1177/0734016816670457.

[50] John C. Moorhouse and Brent Wanner, "Does Gun Control Reduce Crime or Does Crime Increase Gun Control?," *Cato Journal* 26, no. 1 (2006), https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/cato/v26n1/v26n1f.pdf.

[51] Jared Nelson, "'By Each Crime and Every Kindness, We Birth Our Future' A Buddhist Perspective Towards High Crime Rates," *Journal of Race, Gender and Poverty*, 2018, p.31. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3131022.

[52] Nelson, "'By Each Crime and Every Kindness, We Birth Our Future' A Buddhist Perspective Towards High Crime Rates."p.24.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

As previous studies have shown, laws are ineffective because they only address the consequences and not the root cause. For example, gun control laws such as waiting periods, purchase permits, registration, and handgun licensing laws are intended to reduce gun ownership. This also points to the inadequacy of the law, as John C. Moorhouse and Brent Wanner (2006) concluded, " it might be that gun control simply does not influence the behavior of criminals in their efforts to obtain and use firearms."[53] Buddhism, on the other hand, addresses the problem by addressing the root cause.

5.1 Buddhist View on Causes of Violence

Using violence to resolve conflict is considered the worst solution in Buddhism. The violent person not only creates bad karma for himself but also suffers the consequences of his actions. Violence, both physical and verbal, does not solve the root of the problem. According to Dhammapada, "Whatever harm an enemy may do to an enemy, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind inflicts on oneself a greater harm (Dhp 42)."[54] From a Buddhist perspective, all suffering and conflict originate from greed, anger, and ignorance. And to end this cycle of violence "Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth (Dhp 223)."[55]

It is clear that all the greed, anger, ignorance and irresponsibility of living beings originate from the mind. The philosophy of Buddhism is to guide people to train their minds to avoid the arising of bad thoughts which will obviously lead to bad actions. According to Thich

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[53] John C. Moorhouse and Brent Wanner, "Does Gun Control Reduce Crime or Does Crime Increase Gun Control?," *Cato Journal* 26, no. 1 (2006), p.122, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/cato/v26n1/v26n1f.pdf.
[54] Acharya Buddharakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), p.29.
[55] Buddharakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom,* p.58.

Nhat Hanh (2006), "There are both wholesome and unwholesome seeds in our mind-field, sown by ourselves and our parents, schooling, ancestors, and society. If you plant wheat, wheat will grow. If you act in a wholesome way, you will be happy. If you act in an unwholesome way, you will water the seeds of craving, anger, and violence in yourself and in others."[56] To solve this problem, people should be encouraged to live according to the Five Precepts of Buddhism and meditate to increase mindfulness and compassion. As Venerable master Hsing Yun (2018) emphasized, “when we undertake the precepts we will not violate others, and as long as we can discipline ourselves, we will also not be breaking the laws of society.”[57] The Venerable also pointed out that if everyone lives ethically for themselves, there will be no crime in society. To cultivate mindfulness, the Buddha's teachings provide the Noble Eightfold Path for lay people to practice.

5.2 The Noble Eightfold Path (Sayādaw, 2008) [58]

The Noble Eightfold Path is a central doctrine in Buddhist teachings, representing a comprehensive guide to the practical steps needed to overcome suffering and ultimately achieve enlightenment, known as Nirvana. Each of the eight components serves as an important pillar supporting the spiritual journey, providing a multifaceted approach to personal development and spiritual practice. This path leads people to a harmonious existence based on ethical conduct, mental clarity, and profound inner peace.

1. Right View (Sammā-diṭṭhi) is the foundational factor, emphasizing the importance of understanding the nature of reality, especially the concepts of karma (action) and its consequences. This includes a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths, which outline the

[56] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Understanding Our Mind* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 2006), p.68.
[57] Hsing Yun, *The Five Precepts* (Taiwan: Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center, 2018), p.23.
[58] Ledi Sayādaw, *The Noble Eightfold Path and Its Factors Explained (Maggaṅga-Dīpanī)*, Online (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008).

nature of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. Right View cultivates a perspective that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the moral significance of one's actions.

2. Right Thought (Sammā-saṅkappa) follows, focusing on the development of thoughts characterized by love, compassion, and non-attachment. This component encourages practitioners to cultivate mental states that promote kindness and benevolence, while cultivating a mindset free of harmful desires and aversions. By aligning one's thoughts with ethical intentions, practitioners can create a foundation for wholesome actions.

3. Right Speech (Sammā-vācā) involves engaging in honest, harmonious, and constructive communication. Practitioners are encouraged to speak with integrity, avoiding lying, slander, slander, or any form of harmful speech. This aspect not only enhances interpersonal relationships but also contributes to the development of a compassionate and honest society.

4. Right Action (Sammā-kammanta) emphasizes ethical conduct through morally wholesome actions. This includes refraining from actions such as killing, stealing, and engaging in sexual misconduct, thus ensuring that one's conduct is beneficial to oneself and others.

5. Right livelihood (Sammā-ājīva) addresses the ethical implications of one's occupation. Practitioners are encouraged to seek livelihoods that do not harm others and are consistent with Buddhist principles. This means avoiding occupations that involve exploitation, violence, or deception.

6. Right effort (Sammā-vāyāma) involves sustained effort to cultivate wholesome states of mind while eliminating negative states. This may include activities that promote mindfulness and meditation, promoting personal growth through disciplined effort.

7. Right mindfulness (Sammā-sati) focuses on cultivating awareness of the present moment. This includes mindfulness of bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and mental states, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of one's experiences and reactions.

8. Right concentration (Sammā-samādhi) culminates in the development of deep mental concentration through meditation. This practice leads to states of intense concentration, deep insight into the nature of reality, and contributes to the attainment of states of deep calm and peace.

Together, the eight components of the Noble Eightfold Path provide a comprehensive and integrated framework for ethical conduct, mental discipline, and the cultivation of wisdom. This path serves as an important guide for individuals seeking enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of suffering. Importantly, the Noble Eightfold Path is not merely an intellectual exercise; it requires diligent practice, reflection, and a steadfast commitment to personal growth along the Buddhist path. Acceptance of this path provides practitioners with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of life, cultivate a sense of harmony within themselves and the world around them, and ultimately lead them to liberation and full enlightenment. The Noble Eightfold Path is thus both a profound teaching and a practical guide to living a meaningful, ethical, and enlightened life.

5.3 Applying the ethical guidance of the Five Precepts to Society more widely and actively

Through the personal and communal levels, the ethical principles of the Five Precepts, which are fundamental to Buddhist teachings, can be actively applied to create a broader positive impact on society.

1. **Individual Level**

Individuals can actively promote the ethical principles of the Five Precepts to others in their daily lives through intentional, mindful actions and attitudes that reflect their commitment to ethical and compassionate living. When integrated into daily behavior, individuals can significantly influence those around them. When more people consciously integrate these values into their daily lives, they create a ripple effect that benefits the entire society, promoting a culture rooted in kindness, justice, and peace.

2. Community Level

In addition to practicing Buddhism, monks also take on the task of propagating Buddhism. According to Venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn (2000), "The Buddha's intention in sending out his followers to propagate Buddhism was for the benefit and happiness of the people and for the welfare of the world."[59] Rajashekar C. Koti et al. (2021) also emphasized, "The monks who have taken on the mission of spreading Buddhism must, as their foundation, have hearts filled with a genuine desire for the benefit and happiness of all people."[60] Thus, to promote the benefits and ethics of Buddhism on a larger scale, it is necessary to support temples, organizations, educational institutions, and universities that promote and teach Buddhist principles. Volunteer work and community service in accordance with the principles are encouraged. By actively promoting and practicing the Five Precepts in these ways, the community can foster collective moral awareness and work towards creating a more ethical, compassionate, and peaceful society.

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[59] Phra Dharmakosajarn, "Buddhist Propagation for World Peace" (Second World Buddhist Propagation Conference, Buddhamonthon, Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2000), p.3, https://www.undv.org/books/03_1_Buddhist_Propagation_for_World_Peace.pdf.

[60] Rajashekar C Koti, Saravana Kadirvel, and Sachin B S, "Propagating Dhamma for Global Peace: Attaining Through Buddhism," *ResearchGate* 3, no. 11 (2021): 75–83.

From the above discussion, if we want to spread the Five Precepts, we must spread Buddhism widely. This is the best way to bring about a peaceful world. This is also recognized in the Buddhist community. There are conferences to find strategies to spread Buddhism. As Venenable Phra Dharmakosajarn said, “We have assembled here for the Buddhist Summit, the Second World Buddhist Propagation Conference (WBPC), to explore ways and means of propagating Buddhism for the sake of world peace.”[61] Although there have been efforts to promote Buddhism in the United States, there have been volunteer groups that have gone into prisons to assist prisoners who want to learn about Buddhism or meditate, but very few. As Dr. Hong stated, "In the past twenty years, there have been a few groups of Buddhist organizations actively volunteering inside the prisons offering Buddhist teachings, chanting services, meditation, and yoga."[62] He also determined that the growth of Buddhism in the United States is not promising, "Buddhism has been in America for a little more than a century. According to the Pew Research Center, the Buddhist population is quite low, 3.9 million or approximately 1% of the US population of 300 million in 2012."[63] So what are the problems with the growth of Buddhism in the United States, what are the obstacles? And what plans do Buddhist organizations have to promote the growth? Further research is needed to clarify the above issues.

[61] Dharmakosajarn, “Buddhist Propagation for World Peace,” p.1.
[62] De Hong, “Teaching Buddhism in Several California State Prisons in the Age of the Internet Plus,” Unk., p.3.
[63] De Hong, “Teaching Buddhism in Several California State Prisons in the Age of the Internet Plus,” Unk., p.7.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

As crime in America continues to rise, the teachings found in Buddhism can be used to inspire the citizens to create a peaceful society together. However, according to Dr. Hong (Unk), Buddhism is currently not in the mainstream as those who practice this religion only make up 1% of America's population. With current laws in the American justice system proving to be ineffective at addressing societal issues at the root cause, Buddhism offers alternatives that address said roots. When people practice and consider these alternatives throughout their daily lives, they will become more mindful and considerate of their environment and others within society. These alternatives include condemning violence, adhering to the Noble Eightfold Path, and considering the Five Precepts on an individual and societal level. Through these teachings, Buddhists and like-minded individuals will be able to live a more meaningful, ethical, and enlightened life. In addition, practitioners will be able to navigate the complexities of life and achieve a more harmonious existence that will ultimately lead to inner peace and become closer to Nirvana. However, as effective as Buddhism is, only 1% of the American population practices Buddhism, thus further research must be conducted to see how Buddhism differs from other religions in terms of gaining popularity and resolving societal problems.

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